

ARTS & SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATE SOCIETY

2011-2012 ASUS EQUITY HANDBOOK



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Hello, and welcome to the first ever Equity Handbook. Thank you for your support in raising awareness about anti-oppression and social justice. The following guide contains activities to complete with your committee (in bold), with discussion points and responses interspersed. If you or your committee has any questions about the following discussions, I can be reached at equity@asus.queensu.ca.

Part 1: Who am I? Questioning visible and invisible identity

Reflect on many aspects of your identity. Share an aspect with the group. Find an aspect of your identity that is unique. Find an aspect that everyone shares. What do you notice about the identities that are raised?

Identity can be visible (ex: race, gender identity, religion, physical abilities) or invisible (ex: class, educational background, mental/learning abilities, sexual orientation, politics, income). We don't know all of the many ways in which people identify themselves, and we can't assume the associations that connect people to various identities.

Our social identity is multi-dimensional and intersecting, chosen for us or by us, valued or not valued. The social group with which we identify affects our values, opportunities, and the ways we are perceived by others.

Part 2: Encountering Difference – Implicit biases

Close your eyes and picture the following scenarios...

A doctor giving a check-up to a patient.

A couple sitting on a bench.

Four friends eating dinner.

(Give participants 10 seconds to picture each scenario, and then discuss the following):

Who came to mind first? Were the people in your images able-bodied? Of a certain race? Of a certain gender or sexual orientation? Were the images influenced by stereotypes and norms that society has decided upon?

All humans have implicit bias that can be conscious or unconscious, but is a predictor of behavior. This bias differs from person to person, depending on their experiences, and can change over time.



Part 3: The Evolution of Oppression

Oppression is the assertion of one group's dominance over another based on the shared identities of the individual groups. In Canadian society, today's oppression involves marginalization, exploitation, dehumanization that often occurs in subtle ways, without overt brutality.

It's easy to think of historical examples of brutal oppression, but what are some examples that you have noticed recently, even in the Queen's community? Fill in the following statement:

When I see/hear/feel _____, I know that issues of oppression persist for _____ today.

Are there certain general social groups that usually seem to be exempt from this oppression?

Part 4: Privilege

Some identities are given special treatment or privilege at the expense of other groups (the oppressed). The privileged groups are more or less able to exercise power and access resources.

Fill in the following statement:

When I see/hear/feel _____, I know that _____ experience privilege.

Privilege is able to occur because its benefits are seen as the norm, the way it is, as a product of common sense, as neutral. The dominance of certain positions is invisible while those oppressed by the dominant are seen as the problem. For example, women are told by their parents, teachers, media, police to avoid dressing a certain way, to cover their drinks in order to not get sexually assaulted; in contrast men are rarely taught to not rape.

What kind of benefits do you receive just because you are identified as part of a certain social group? Is this fair?

Privilege is taken for granted and conferred as the result of systemic, historic processes that value certain identities. Understanding privilege involves understanding systems of oppression and how we are connected to them. Peggy McIntosh wrote about "The Invisible Knapsack", a list of privileges that she receives as a white person. She describes how privilege doesn't just confer certain benefits onto a particular group, it also works to systematically disadvantage other groups based on characteristics like race or sex (as you can see from some points on



the following list). In the following excerpt from her list of 50 points, McIntosh notes that as the bearer of white privilege, she can...

... be sure that [her] children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

...swear, or dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty or the illiteracy of [her] race.

...do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to [her] race, and is never asked to speak for all the people of [her] racial group.

... chose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color and have them more or less match [her] skin.

What other privileges can you think of, to do with race or some other identity?

Part 5: Being an Ally

Being an ally means working to undermine the oppression of a certain group, while under the privilege of identifying as part of a social group.

What is an experience where you were a good ally? What is an experience where someone was a good ally to you?

What do we need to be allies?

- Desire for greater equality, liberty, freedom
- Recognition of personal potential – we can all be allies
- Recognition of human potential – people can change
- Supportive attitude
- Willingness to act everyday – a positive attitude without action does nothing
- Willingness to learn and grow (reflect on mistakes)

Adapted from Ivey, Ivey and Zalaquett – “Building Multicultural Allies”

What should you NOT do?

Deny

Minimalize (Ex: It wasn't so bad)

Blame

Excuse based on unintentionality (Ex: Oh, they/I didn't mean it that way)

It's all in the past, forget about it

Countervictimization or co-victimization (Ex: I feel your pain, I am one of you)

Adapted from Paul Kivel, Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice



What are some examples of how oppression has been reinforced by the negative responses above? Answers may include focus on domestic abuse, racism, and exclusive language...

Part 6: Inclusive Language

Derogatory slang refers to when words that certain groups or individuals may identify with are used to confer negative value.

What is a word that makes you uncomfortable when it used as a negative value judgment?

Some examples might include:

Lame

Retarded

Gay

How do you respond to someone who is using hurtful/oppressive language or making oppressive generalizations/assumptions/statements?

- Interject then and there
- Personalize concern (“It makes me feel uncomfortable when you...”)
- Call it discrimination (“That’s actually a really homophobic slur”)
- Disagree
- Question validity of the statement
- Point out hurtfulness
- Empathetic confrontation (“I also used to use lame as a derogatory word, but then I found out that it can offend some people who identify that way”.)

Taken and adapted from Ishu Ishiyama’s “Anti-Racism Response Training (A.R.T.)”

Have you ever confronted someone about their problematic language or views? What methods have worked for you?

Part 7: Alphabet Soup - LGBT and beyond

If you have time, ask your committee to define each italicized word. Then reveal the actual definition.

L – *Lesbian* – A female-identified individual who is attracted to other female-identified individuals

G – *Gay* – A male-identified individual who is attracted to other male-identified individuals, also a general term for someone who is attracted to a person of the same sex and/or gender.



B – *Bisexual* – A person who is attracted to individuals of both the same and opposite sex... not a transition or ‘confused’ phase, but a legitimate choice.

T – *Transgender* – An umbrella term that includes people who do not abide by traditional male or female roles and expectations, and /or who identify with a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth. Gender identity can either be consistent or can vary over time, depending on the individual. This word generally includes transsexual, two-spirited, cross-dresser, gender-queer, intersex.

T–*Transsexual* – People who live as members of the sex other than the one they were assigned at birth.

T – *Two-Spirited* - A First Nations term for individuals who are considered to be neither women nor men. It often implies a masculine spirit and a feminine spirit living in the same body. Traditionally, two-spirited individuals were seen as having a gift and they performed traditional duties of both genders.

C – *Cross-dressing* - Cross-dressers wear the clothing of the other sex. They vary in how completely they dress (from one article of clothing to fully cross-dressing) as well as in their motives for doing so. Some cross dress to express cross-gender feelings or identities; others cross dress for fun, for emotional comfort, or for sexual arousal.

I – *Intersex* - A person who is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that doesn’t fit the typical definitions of female or male. For example, a person might be born appearing to be female on the outside, but having mostly male-typical anatomy on the inside.

Q – *Queer* - An umbrella term for people who are not heterosexual, heteronormative, or gender-binary. This is a controversial term, having only been reclaimed a couple decades ago from its original use as an anti-gay epithet. Some LGBT people consider this term offensive, since it continues to be used by some as hate speech. Others perceive it as politically radical, or simply a fad of the younger generation.

Q –*Questioning* – People who are exploring or are unsure about their sexuality, or who don’t wish to label themselves for a number of reasons.

G – *Gender queer*- A person whose gender identity does not fit into the socially constructed norms for the sex that they were born as. This is an identity that falls anywhere between man/boy/male and woman/girl/female on the gender spectrum. For some people, this might mean identifying as a woman some days and as a man on other days.

A – *Asexual* - Someone who does not experience sexual attraction. Unlike celibacy, which people choose, asexuality is an intrinsic part of who such a person is.

S –*Straight* – A person who is attracted to someone of the opposite sex.

P – *Pansexual* – A person who may be attracted to others regardless of their gender identity or biological sex. For example, this could include attraction to someone who is male, female, transgender, intersex, gender queer. This is different than bisexual because pansexual people may be attracted to people who fall outside of the gender continuum; attraction is for the person, not for their gender identity.





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